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STARK MOVES TO RESTORE WAYS & MEANS AUTHORITY TO HOLD ADMINISTRATION ACCOUNTABLE FOR IMPROPER ACTIVITY

Offers Amendment to Committee Rules to Allow Minority to Hold Investigatory Hearings if Majority Refuses

WASHINGTON, DC – In light of the Ways and Means Committee's failure to subpoena former CMS Administrator Tom Scully, among others, for improperly withholding information from Congress on the cost of the Medicare drug bill, Rep. Pete Stark today sought to amend the Committee's rules to ensure it conducts proper hearings when Administration officials break the rules.

"During the Medicare debate in the last Congress, our committee's leadership failed to hold the likes of Tom Scully and other officials accountable for intentionally lying to Congress," Stark said. "As our committee takes the lead in the important debate over Social Security, it is vital that we -- and more importantly the American people -- get straight answers from the Administration. Fulfilling our committee's responsibility in this regard is vital to upholding the fundamental checks and balances that are at the heart of our democracy."

The Stark amendment would have given the Minority the ability to conduct investigative hearings and subpoena witnesses if the Majority refuses to hold a hearing within 30 days of the Minority's hearing request. The amendment was defeated on a party-line vote.

"Controlling both houses of Congress and the White House, Republicans clearly don't see the incentive to expose potential wrong-doing by the Administration," said Rep. Stark. "The amendment I offered today would have restored a higher standard of conduct by allowing the Minority to carry out hearings -- with full subpoena authority -- if the Majority is unwilling to exercise the committee's basic oversight responsibilities," said Stark.

The amendment would have:

- Allowed the Ranking Member to request in writing that the Chairman hold a hearing regarding alleged ethical misconduct or any violation of the law by an Administration employee;
- Allowed the Minority to move forward with an official Ways and Means Committee hearing if the Chairman chose not to hold a hearing within 30 calendar days of the Minority's request;
- Allowed the Minority to schedule the hearing, select and invite the witnesses, and exercise subpoena powers.

In explaining the need for this rules change, Rep. Stark said, "There are so many examples of potential wrong-doing occurring right now -- within our committee's jurisdiction alone. The examples go on and on and yet the Ways and Means Committee has done nothing to investigate these potential wrongs. Enactment of this amendment would return oversight as a core duty of our committee. If the Republicans don't want to conduct it, Democrats would be able to do it on our own."

Cases of questionable and improper activity include:

- The cover-up by the Administration of the cost of the Medicare bill;
- The GAO findings that CMS created news reports on the prescription drug bill, unbeknownst to the public;
- Recent grants from the Department of Health and Human Services to news columnists for the purpose of supporting President Bush's marriage agenda;
- Actions by the Social Security Administration urging its employees to promote the Administration's Social Security privatization plan.

